

MISSISSIPPI LIBRARY COMMISSION  
3881 Eastwood Drive  
Jackson, MS 39211

May 30, 2007

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch  
Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Portals II, Room TW-A325  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Reply Comments  
Inquiry Concerning the Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability  
GN Docket No. 07-45

Dear Ms. Dortch:

I am writing to submit these reply comments in support of the Comments of the American Library Association (ALA) in this proceeding. I am Ruth Pierce, Mississippi Public Library E-Rate Coordinator. I have served in this capacity since the program began with the Mississippi Library Commission (from 1997-2000). Since March 2000, the Library Commission has contracted with the First Regional Library for my services as e-rate coordinator.

In 1997, the Mississippi Legislature had funded a state-wide network that would connect public libraries, schools, community colleges and colleges and universities to the Internet. Approximately 120 public libraries in Mississippi had been connected to that state network when the Universal Service Discount Program was created. Since Mississippi, at that time, epitomized the digital divide, the Mississippi Library Commission assumed a pro-active role in assisting public libraries in our state in completing all paperwork necessary to fully utilize the discounts available through the Universal Service Discount Program.

The ALA raised some important issues in its comments to the FCC's inquiry. I am writing to augment some of those expressed concerns. First, we support the ALA's request that the Commission explore the impact of broadband technologies on public libraries. As the ALA noted, about 98% of public libraries provide some form of Internet access. In the State of Mississippi all of our public libraries (241) provide access to the Internet for our patrons. In many of our communities, our patrons do not have Internet access in their homes, so the connectivity offered in their local libraries is vital. We find that our public libraries are used by all segments of our communities, including students (on all levels), local government workers, teachers, and the elderly. Some of the most popular uses are resume preparation, instructional videos, networking, and research

The ALA also noted, however, that only 45% of public libraries nationwide are satisfied with their level of broadband connectivity. We are concerned that the current marketplace is not working adequately to meet the needs of our public libraries. In our state, the primary provider of broadband services is AT&T (formerly Bellsouth), who hold a state master contract to provide such service. Until recently, the public libraries in Mississippi were allocated 3% of the state backbone. Our larger library systems have suffered delays and slow service due to this allocation, particularly during the afternoon (when students need access most

For these reasons, we support ALA's suggestion that the FCC should encourage the public providers of broadband connectivity to work more closely with public libraries. Our public libraries need more bandwidth, preferably at lower rates than the general "market-based rates" that are currently being offered to us. But most important, we would like to find a way for the broadband providers in our state to work with us to find solutions to our broadband issues.

Given the important role that public libraries play in our society and economy, we encourage the FCC to increase its focus on the need to provide public libraries with enhanced broadband connectivity in this proceeding.

Sincerely,

Ruth Pierce  
MS Public Library E-Rate Coordinator  
Mississippi Library Commission